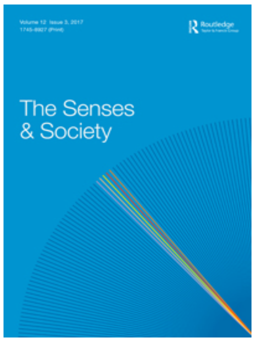

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Senses and Society

ISSN: 1745-8927 (Print) 1745-8935 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfss20

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To cite this article: Michele Friedner & Pamela Block (2017) Deaf studies meets autistic studies, The Senses and Society, 12:3, 282-300, DOI: 10.1080/17458927.2017.1369716

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2017.1369716

THE SENSES AND SOCIETY, 2017
VOL. 12, NO. 3, 282–300
https://doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2017.1369716

Deaf studies meets autistic studies

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ABSTRACT
What might deaf studies and autistic studies have in common? Why, in many cases, is deafness considered to be a norm to be analyzed through linguistic and cultural frameworks, while autism is (still) seen as pathological? Utilizing ethnographic research, participation in two conferences on autism and sign language, and an analysis of deaf peoples' and autistic peoples' self-(re)presentation, we attend to sensory solidarities that might exist between deaf and autistic people, communities, and studies. We argue that an analysis of the two fields side-by-side offers important insights into new ways of conceptualizing sociality, identity, and community both in the specific cases of deafness and autism, and more broadly. Additionally, attending to deaf and autistic peoples' language and communication desires and practices opens up analytic and empirical space for considering interdependent and multimodal communicative approaches.

KEYWORDS
Deafness; autism; neurodiversity; neuroqueer; sociality; signed languages; disability; communication

Introduction

A deaf[1] person and an autistic person walk into a room...rather than tell a bad joke, our aim is to put deaf studies and autistic studies in conversation with each other and to consider how the two fields are good to think through in relation to each other. How might thinking about deaf peoples' experiences through the lens of social science and humanities scholarship on autism create new ways to think about deaf cultures, communities, and communication, for example? Similarly, how might research on signed languages and deaf people's experiences be productive for developing studies of autistic peoples' communication practices as well as ideas of autistic self- and other- identification? While different sensory experiences, diagnoses, and impairment categories of course come with their own particularities and while we (or at least Michele is) are increasingly mistrustful of the universalizing that happens through the one-size-fits-all umbrella category of "disability" or "cross-disability," we are interested in productive parallels and overlaps in deaf studies and autistic studies as well as the ways that the two fields might learn from each other and ultimately lead to new ways of thinking about the categories of deafness and autism as well as conducting research with deaf and autistic individuals, families, and communities. What kinds of sensory

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solidarities, convergences, and overlaps might exist? And what to make of divergences in both scholarly and activist approaches?

We argue that in the cases of both deafness and autism, scholars and activists are engaged in "language games" (Wittgenstein 1953) around creating conditions of possibility for valuing deaf and autistic ways of being in the world. In addition, within the categories of deafness and autism, stakeholders have mobilized concepts of culture and community in exerting presence and staking claims to inclusion and rights. In terms of comparison and overlap, deaf studies has argued that deaf people's signed languages are languages like any other and that deaf people can do everything that hearing people can do except hear, an often-quoted statement by I. King Jordan, Gallaudet University's first deaf president. This success in normalizing and celebrating deafness and deaf peoples' languages is an area in which autistic scholars are attempting to learn from deaf researchers. And, autistic researchers have created new models and frameworks for analyzing autistic identity and community; these models and frameworks might be ones which deaf studies might be well to consider as we argue below that they are potentially (more) inclusive and allow for a diverse range of ways of being in and relating to the world.

We draw on participation at two Conversations on Autism and Sign Language (CASL), an interdisciplinary conference spearheaded by two Stony Brook University faculty in Linguistics, Mark Aronoff, and Psychology, Matthew Lerner, focused on applying insights from the history of studying signed languages to exploring new approaches in the study of autistic peoples' communication. The first conference was held at Stony Brook University in 2014 and the second at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2015. CASL, held over two days on these two occasions, was what medical anthropologist Cohen (1995) terms an "epistemological carnival" in that researchers from across disciplines and positions came to the conference to think about new ways of theorizing and thinking about autistic communication. There were traditional conference talks, breakout sessions, and informal panels. Deaf studies scholars and sign language linguists shared the history of the fields of deaf studies and sign language linguistics with conference participants. Notably, there were no researchers present who focused on cochlear implantation, speech therapy and oralism (teaching deaf children to speak and lipread), or cures for deafness; the focus was purely (and intentionally) on deafness as non-pathological. However, this was not the case with autism and conference participants included researchers who came from the fields of neuroscience and psychology. Presentations on autism ranged from those focused on "optimal outcomes," curing or removing the diagnosis of autism or at least managing it through the controversial Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA),[2] a technique that intervenes on autistic peoples' behaviors determined to be deviant, and those by scholars proposing autistic culture and arguing for the preservation of autistic people in the world. As such, there was a wide (and contentious) ideological divide between the scholars promoting autistic culture and those promoting managing or curing autism. Indeed, what constituted an "optimal outcome" was very much contested.

Perhaps what was most striking to us at CASL was that many participants were ostensibly seeking to glean insights from research on signed languages and the field of deaf studies without being willing to recognize that many autistic people also see themselves as possessing a culture and community, similar to deaf people. What does it mean that in this case deafness– and deaf peoples' right to communicate through signed languages– was accepted and taken for granted while autism was something that could and should be eradicated according to some participants? In this heated environment, we– a deaf medical anthropologist (Michele) and a non-disabled cultural anthropologist with family experiences of autism (Pamela) – decided to write this essay in order to foreground deaf and autistic peoples' desires for deaf and autistic worlds to continue to exist. Despite our different disciplinary backgrounds, we are united in that we take a critical disability studies (Minich 2016) perspective in our work which involves foregrounding and valuing disabled peoples' voices and ways of being in the world. We state from the outset that we are not interested in discussing deaf or autistic people in terms of dysfunction or lack, nor will we provide overcoming or compensatory narratives of deaf or autistic people's "special" skills or attributes. Inspired by Kafer (2013), we seek to imagine both research and everyday worlds in which there are both more disabled researchers and more disabled people. Going forward, we provide an overview of deaf studies and autism studies and we then move to thematics or topics in which we see productive conversation and overlaps. We draw from ethnographic data that we have collected in research and personal experience with deaf and autistic people and advocates in the United States, a review of deaf and autistic studies research, and social media sources.[3]

The terrain: deaf studies and autistic studies

Deaf studies

According to Kusters, De Meulder, and O'Brien (2017a), Deaf Studies as an academic discipline emerged in the 1970s shortly after the birth of sign language linguistics as an academic discipline. Early sign language linguists, notably William Stokoe based at Gallaudet University, successfully argued that signed languages were legitimate languages, just like other languages. As sign language, here American Sign Language, became authorized, there was an emergence of social and cultural research on deaf peoples' distinct cultural and sensory orientations (Rosen 2012). Most notably, Padden (1980) argued for the existence of a deaf culture that is distinct from hearing culture and Woodward (1982) stressed the need to differentiate between "lower case d" deaf and "capital D" Deaf in order to make a distinction between deafness as a medical condition and Deafness as marking a linguistic and cultural group. Deaf studies has largely been a Western-centered discipline, closely connected to the teaching of signed languages, especially at such institutions as Gallaudet University in the USA and Bristol University in the UK. In addition, deaf studies can be considered an activist discipline, in addition to a scholarly one, and its emergence closely coincided with the civil rights movement in the United States and growing awareness of oppression. Accordingly, famous deaf studies conferences such as the The Deaf Way, held at Gallaudet University in 1989 and 2002, and Deaf Studies Today, irregularly held at Utah Valley College, have attracted deaf activists, scholars, and community members.

Since Padden's (1980) and Woodward's (1982) seminal contributions, scholars have contributed other concepts to help foreground deaf peoples' unique experiences in the world such as Ladd's (2003) concept of "Deafhood," Murray's (2008) concept of deaf peoples' "coequality" with hearing people, and Bauman and Murray's concept of "Deaf Gain," which exists "to counter the frame of hearing loss as it refers to the unique cognitive, creative, and cultural gains manifested through deaf ways of being in the world." (Bauman and Murray 2014, xv). In addition, scholars have focused on diverse concepts such as deaf spaces, deaf socialities, deaf networks, deaf ontologies, and deaf epistemologies (see Kusters and Friedner 2015;

Kusters, De Meulder, and O'Brien 2017a for an overview of such concepts) in order to respond to Humphries' (2008, 41) call for deaf studies to move from "'How are we different?' to 'How are we being?'" However, as we discuss, there remains a tension between these two questions and deaf studies, in arguing for deaf people's differences in relation to hearing people, potentially falls into a trap of arguing for deaf peoples' exceptionalism in ways that are limiting and exclusive. What are the stakes in arguing for deaf peoples' value in terms of what they contribute to and how they benefit society, two central arguments in Bauman and Murray's (2014) conceptualization of Deaf Gain?

While deaf studies has largely resisted being associated with disability studies due to the desire to differentiate Deafness as a linguistic and cultural identity from deafness as medical impairment (Burch and Kafer 2010), deaf studies scholars have recently taken up the challenges of considering how deafness intersects with other categories of difference (i.e. Brueggemann and Burch 2006; Ruiz-Williams et al. 2015). And, deaf studies scholars, similar to disability studies scholars, have argued that deaf studies has much to offer and contribute in evaluating norms, beyond a discussion of deaf people's experiences and ways that audism (the belief that people can hear are superior), and phonocentrism (the privileging of sound and speech) work (Bauman 2004). For example, Bauman and Murray (2016), 245 write: "One of Deaf studies' critical theoretical activities, therefore, involves the reconstruction of a more inclusive and accurate definition of the nature of human language and all the implications that extend from this move."

Autistic studies

Tellingly, a Google search for "autism studies" or "autistic studies" results in website after website broadcasting academic programs in medical and rehabilitation studies relating to autism. There is no mention of autistic culture, community, or writings by autistic people. While the field of clinical and developmental studies of autism is growing, there are also interdisciplinary social science and humanities efforts to provide an alternate perspective on the experiences of autistic people and communities and to offer counterpoints to narratives of autism that are embedded in failure, deficit, and lack, such as those offered up by the media-savvy research and lobbying organization Autism Speaks, which is despised by many autistic advocates. These alternative forms of inquiry attend to how autistic people communicate with each other and with people who are not autistic as well as how autistic people experience the world in ways that are not framed through the lens of deficiency or lack. As we discuss below, communication is a main flashpoint in discussions of autism, from the clinical and developmental pathologization of the "non-verbal" and "low-functioning" autistic person to the "verbose" and "high-functioning" "shiny aspie" or person with Asperger's Syndrome. There has also been a focus on facilitated communication, both by researchers and activists, sometimes very much at odds with each other.

Autistic scholars and their allies have banded together in the creation of the genre of "auti-ethnography" (Bascom 2012; Yergeau 2012; Sequenzia and Grace 2015), which uses critical theory combined with self- and other- reflection in order to authorize autistic perspectives on the world. They have also proposed new umbrella concepts under which autistic people can come together, such as neurodiversity, neurodivergent, and neuroqueer (Walker 2014). Walker (2014) defines neurodiversity as "the diversity of human brains and minds – the infinite variation of neurocognitive functioning within our species." Neurodiversity is considered to be not a theory or a position but a fact, similar to bio-diversity (Silberman 2015). Neurodivergence, defined by Walker (2014), but coined by Kassiane Sibley, means having a brain that is different from what is considered "normal" within a particular social context. (see https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions/). Additionally, scholars and activists have increasingly used the concept neuroqueer, which we discuss in more depth below, as "queering our neurodivergence, neurodiversifying our queer;" neuroqueer is perhaps a more activist concept (Grace 2013). There is the Loud Hands Project,[4] which seeks to "record, nurture, and amplify the many different identities, voices, and ways of speaking and knowing that the Autistic community has." (https://loudhandsproject.org/faq; Yergeau 2012), as well as a new publishing press focused on disseminating the writings of neurodivergent people (https://autpress.com/) under the motto of "weird books for weird people." Examples of books published include *Loud Hands: Autistic People Speaking* (Bascom 2012), and *Typed Words, Loud Voices* (Sequenzia and Grace 2015). Autistic scholars and allies have also made important contributions to thinking about how autism is constituted through rhetoric (Broderick and Ne'eman 2008; Broderick 2011; Stevenson, Harp, and Gernsbacher 2011). There are planned gatherings where autistic activists and scholars meet as well as interest groups at many more general national conferences, such as AUTCOM, TASH, and the Society for Disability Studies. There are virtual communities and social media groups that provide rich opportunities for discussion, debate and relationship building.

Note that what we are calling "autistic studies" does not (yet) exist in that there are no academic programs currently devoted to its study (although autistic scholars and scholars of autism can be found across university departments). Rather we are referring to a range of scholarly, artistic, and activist outputs that can be seen as a counter-narrative to what is normatively accepted to be studies on autism. Following Linton (1998), we are interested in the fault lines around and between different kinds of autistic studies and thinking about who gets to "claim" autistic studies; indeed, we see the work of the scholars and projects that we mention above as engaging in reclamation. Autistic studies is thus similar to deaf studies in that it has an activist bent and is intent on foregrounding the experiences of autistic people; and interestingly enough, many autistic people have claimed to be "capital A" Autistic, borrowing directly from deaf studies scholars and deaf activists who identify as "capital D" Deaf (Hughes n.d.). Going forward, we (strategically) refer to autistic studies as the critical social science and humanities study of autistic peoples' lives, experiences, and perspectives and clinical and developmental autism studies as the effort by clinical and developmental researchers (psychologists and others who may not necessarily be working in clinics or medical settings) to view autism as a deficit or problem to be solved (although, there are of course clinical and developmental autism researchers who are allies to autistic people and who have supported autistic peoples' self-advocacy).

Language and communication

Communication modalities

As discussed above, deaf studies has long been focused on the study of signed languages and has done important work to demonstrate that signed languages are legitimate languages. Most recently, attention has shifted to studying signed languages outside the west such as the cases of the emergence of Nicaraguan Sign Language (Senghas et al. 2005), studies of the indigenous El-Sayyid Sign Language in the Israeli Negev (Senghas 2005), and natural sign in Nepali villages (Green 2014), for example. There has also been increased interest in the emergence of Protactile American Sign Language (PTSL) used by deafblind communities in the US (Edwards 2015) as well as on understanding sign language acquisition by deaf children (Meier 2016). Additionally, scholars have also attended to the political stakes of legislation and state recognition of signed languages (De Meulder 2015). Attention has also been devoted to sign language endangerment and what deaf studies scholars have called linguistic genocide as there is a sense that signed languages are devalued and are dying out especially as a result of cochlear implantation. (Skutnabb-Kangas 2014).

However, in focusing on the emergence of signed languages, deaf studies and social science scholars have perhaps backgrounded other ways that deaf people can and do communicate such as through using speech and reading lips, typing, writing notes, gesture, and so on up to now. In foregrounding signed languages, deaf studies is perhaps missing the opportunity to analyze a wide range of deaf peoples' communicative repertoires (although there is a move towards thinking about translanguaging and multimodality, see Kusters, Swanwick, and Tapio 2017b, forthcoming)[5]. While deaf studies has unpacked an (un)conscious focus on audition and speaking in daily life and problematized language ideologies in this respect, it is important to think about other communicative methods and practices besides signed languages—and beyond the category of languages in general– and this is perhaps where autistic scholars and researchers attending to stimming (practices such as flapping arms, humming, spinning, playing with a rubber band, knitting, doodling, and tapping a foot or at the extreme, self-injurious behaviors such as hitting oneself or head banging) and flapping, as well as explorations of other means of communication can be useful. Indeed, autistic studies ruptures normative ideas of what it means to communicate and to desire communication. Beyond this, autistic peoples' experiences unsettle the relationship between language and communication and challenge us to consider that which is non-linguistic as authoritative and meaningful.

Additionally, autistic studies researchers argue against normative communicative embodiments in foregrounding how communicative requirements such as making eye contact and engaging in active and reciprocal communication can be problematic (Yergeau 2010, 2012, 2013; Sequenzia and Grace 2015; Bascom 2012). At CASL, for example, autistic scholars stressed that attempts to train them as children to make eye contact, using behavioral incentives such as M&M's or other treats, were painful and traumatic. They raised important questions about the value of normative ideas of eye contact. We see this as serving as a compliment to deaf studies works on deaf peoples' distinct communicative norms of asking each other questions regarding emplacement in deaf communities (Padden and Humphries 1988), as well as deaf peoples' distinct use of space such as not standing too close together while talking, strategically using low-pitched sounds such as stomping to get attention, and sitting in circles while communicating in larger groups, for example (see https://www.gallaudet.edu/campus-design-and-planning/deafspace). We also see autistic scholars' critique of communicative norms as a rejoinder to deaf studies focus on visuality and the often-repeated statement that "deaf people are people of the eye." As we discuss, autistic studies can contribute new understandings of the creative (and communicative) potential of refusal to engage in normative communication; refusal, as Simpson (2014) argues, can be an agentive act. In combination, deaf studies and autistic studies together can result in a new way of understanding non-normative communication and embodiment.

The tension between normativity and non-normativity brings us to one of our concerns with deaf studies: it replaces "normal" hearing people with "normal" deaf people. As Ladd (2003) points out, being a deaf person with deaf parents, grandparents, and other family is often valorized and Michele has also observed that there is much value placed on beautiful signing in deaf contexts in the US and elsewhere; such signing is often called "a feast for the eyes." The "normal" deaf person is typically a native signer, steeped in deaf social and communicative norms, emplaced in deaf communities via educational institutions and attending deaf social events, and possibly possessing deaf family. For sure, this centering of deaf ways of being in the world and deaf values is needed in light of the prevalence of a deficit model and the existence of a research and advocacy movement focused on cochlear implantation and oral language acquisition. Our point is that in deaf studies scholars' labor to offer counter narratives and to center the use of signed languages, they (re)produce a new normal. Indeed, in an ethnographic study of a specialized deaf unit in the UK-based National Health Services child and mental health services, Brenman and colleagues (2017) note that diagnosing autism in deaf children, while accompanied by unique challenges relating to language, was dependent on evaluating deviations from appropriate manifestations of deaf cultural ways of being in the world. That is, being culturally deaf was considered acceptable while there was no space for being culturally autistic; autism existed solely in the realm of pathology. We ask, along with Gernsbacher (2014), why deaf people can be considered members of a cultural group while autistic people are seen solely as possessing social and communication deficits?[6]

In the fields of clinical and developmental autism studies, approaches to treating autism focus on deficits in communicating verbally (with an emphasis on speaking) and nonverbally understanding social cues. Verbal communication is prioritized and even fetishized. Autistic people who cannot speak are often considered incapable of complex communication and those autistic people who type or communicate with their bodies in other ways are seen as either hoaxes or dismissed as low functioning. Thomas and Boellstorff (2017) offer an important ethnographically-grounded critique of the metaphor of the autism spectrum and how it was normalized; they shed light on the politics and practices of categorizing people as alternatively low and high functioning as well as the work that members of the autism community do in order to conceptualize themselves and others as existing on this spectrum; in doing so, they problematize the taken-for-granted assumptions that clinical and developmental autism researchers make about diagnosis. Communication is also seen as something enacted independently. Thus an autistic person who needs physical human or technological support is never an independent communicator in this view (Biklen et al. 2005; Bilken and Burke 2006). These framings and paradigms are problematic from social science, disability studies, and autistic studies perspectives in which all communication is a form of social interaction and is always contingent and constrained by systems of power within social networks.

Clinical and developmental autism researchers and practitioners may understand communication as static (e.g. a person's communication ability is unchanging from moment to moment or day to day), though there may be recognition that changes may take place over longer periods of time. In developmental psychology research and clinical psychological treatment, a person's communication and other functional abilities are assessed and rated.

That frozen moment in which the evaluation took place often comes to represent the person's ability to communicate and function – at least until the next evaluation. This is not our experience nor is it reflected in the evidence that we have collected through interviews and analysis of discourse and cultural productions by and about autistic people. For example, three of the autistic people that Pamela interviewed in 2016 for a emerging project documenting the life experiences and daily experiences of autistic adults on Long Island, New York and in Toronto, Canada described themselves as extremely good communicators on a verbal level while having great difficulty understanding social cues (also see Gernsbacher, Stevenson, and Dern 2017).

On the other hand there are autistic people who are fully attuned to social nuances although they might appear otherwise: Pamela's sister Hope (who is nonspeaking) and Pamela's interlocutor Adam Wolfond (who speaks sometimes with difficulty) describe their unruly bodies that make it so difficult for them to be verbal or speaking, yet in both their verbal and nonverbal daily interactions, both show very acute understanding of social nuances. For example Hope will communicate through physical humor – pretending to step into a wastepaper basket, pretending to undo her seatbelt and gesturing that she might open the car door, or rushing to steal someone's chair after they have vacated it. These are all nonverbal means of social interaction for her. During a 10 November 2016 presentation for a disability studies class at the University of Toronto, Adam described how difficult and frustrating it was to make his body do what he wanted it to do and how sluggish communication could be as a result. He knew the expectations for communication and how bodies should be in social situations, but his body defied his wishes. He writes: "My body sometimes feels like a pulsating form of paint and I can't always assemble my thoughts as you would like…and thinking through a lot like a body that is always moving."(Wolfond 2016). Both Hope and Adam, who we select to discuss because Pamela has worked with them (and see Biklen et al. 2005; Bascom 2012; Sequenzia and Grace 2015 for many additional examples), engage in what autistic studies approaches (Bascom 2012) call "loud hands and bodies. They flap, stim, flick their fingers and may have trouble keeping still or initiating movement. These movements (or lack of movements) are identifiers to some clinicians, professionals, and many people generally that their ability to communicate in complex ways is questionable (and they are also identifiers to autistic people seeking out signs of community and shared practices). We stress that for many clinical and developmental researchers, the idea that autistic people who behave in ways typically identified as "low functioning" might be capable of complex thought is, for some unthinkable—and this is what autistic studies seeks to combat.

Our research and personal experiences with deaf and autistic people also demonstrate that communication abilities and desires (and communicative repertoires) vary. There are deaf people who enjoy using their voices and welcome the opportunity to use different communication modalities in different spaces (although, of course not all deaf people have the choice and hearing/speaking privilege to do this). One only has to think of the American deaf actress Marlee Matlin, for example, who alternatively signs and speaks depending on the situation. Similarly, very fluently verbal autistic people can move back and forth between speaking and not-speaking, often referred to as "situational mutism" or "selective mutism" as anthropologist Heather Thomas pointed out to us. For example, Pamela attended a meeting of the Neurodiversity Caucus of the Society for Disability Studies Annual conference in 2015 where she saw an autistic scholar speak eloquently for a long while before requesting that someone take the microphone as she was having a hard time talking. Someone took the microphone for a few minutes but somehow it returned quickly to this scholar who spoke for a few additional minutes before urgently requesting that someone take the microphone immediately as she was losing the ability to speak. This was accomplished and for about 15 min, the scholar clearly engaged with attendees through smiling and nodding before indicating she was ready to start speaking again. There is also Mel Baggs, an autistic person who previously used verbal language and now communicates almost exclusively through typing (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hl2jc). Baggs' media work critiques the privileging of normative language and is an argument for attending to other forms of communication and meaning making that are not linguistic.

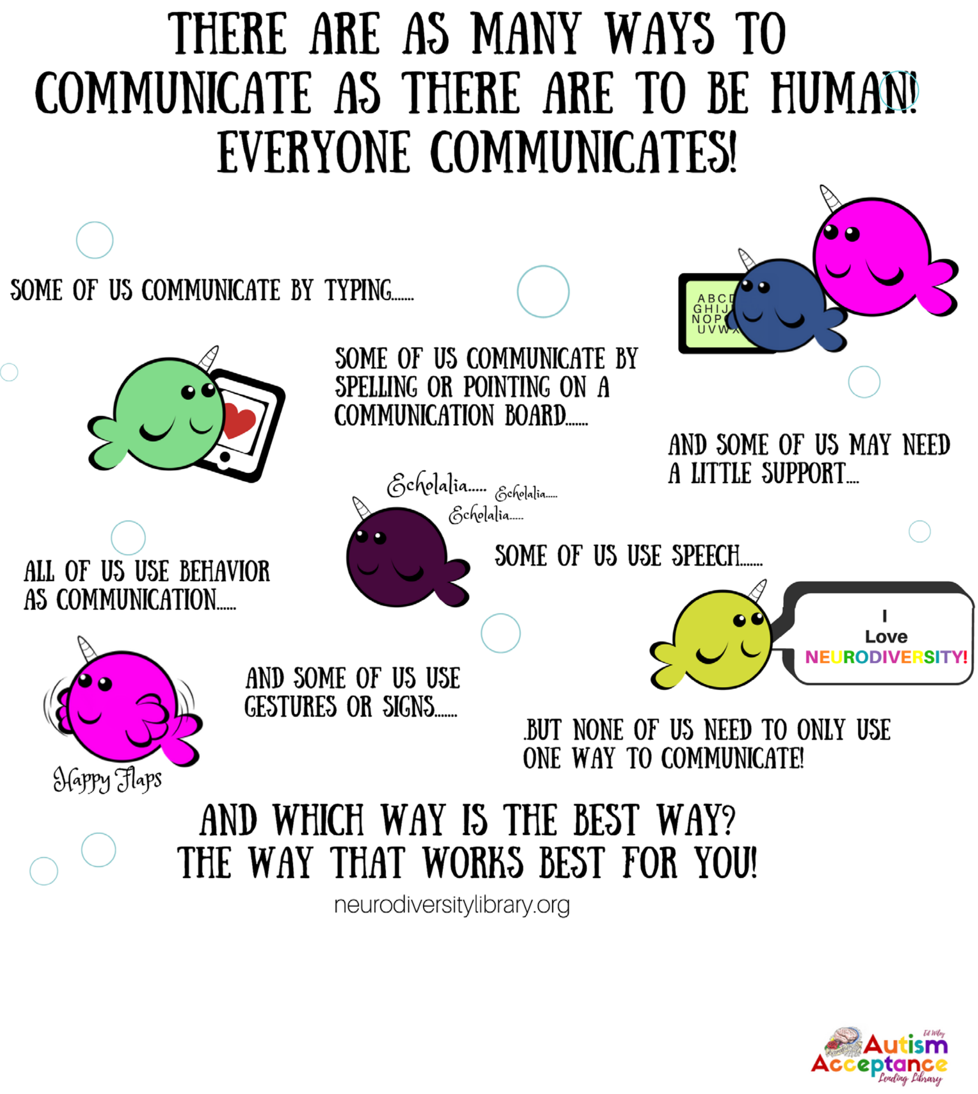

Image courtesy of Ed Wiley Autism Acceptance Lending Library; we wish to foreground the focus on communication and not language.

We wish to foreground an example of mediated communication and sociality that included communicative refusal because we see this practice as raising questions about communicative norms in both conference and everyday spaces: at the Society for Disability Studies annual conference, attendees were given red, yellow, and green colored stickers to place on their conference badges[7]. If an attendee put a red sticker on her badge, it meant that she did not want to be approached or addressed. If she placed a yellow sticker on her badge, it meant that she wanted to be approached only by people who already knew her. A green sticker meant that anyone, known and unknown, could approach her for interaction. This was a practice advocated for by autistic attendees (and it was adopted at CASL as well) and people often moved between different color stickers at various times in the conference. In its structuring, and at times refusal, of communicative sociality (Green 2014), this practice offers an important challenge to work in deaf studies which has often focused on deaf peoples' desires to communicate with other—deaf and hearing—people in signed languages. Indeed, this practice raises questions about what it might mean to avoid, refuse, or desire not to communicate.

Mediated/facilitated communication

Communicating through typing, text messaging, and other forms of mediation are practices that both deaf and autistic people alternatively prefer and shun. Michele has a deaf colleague who is a professor at an elite university in the US. He prefers to conduct his graduate seminars through Skype or another chat format whereby all students are in the same chat space and interaction happens through text. In addition, technology has enabled the spread of signed languages, including often-controversial International Sign (Iikbasaran 2015) through video-logs and YouTube videos. And the Internet provides a platform that is increasingly a means of identity and community formation, via Facebook for example (Kurz and Cuculick 2015). In Michele's research with deaf people in urban India, an altogether different context, she learned that text messaging was increasingly a means of spreading information and news, especially about upcoming meetings, although people still preferred to share important news face-to-face (although note that "face-to-face" is increasingly including video chatting platforms such as Oovoo, Skype, and Facetime).

This utilization of online communication is also important for some autistic people: For many autistic people online communication is a means to social interaction without the pressures of bodily interferences, sensory overloads and anxieties. Many autistic people have complex social engagements on online discussion groups, online gaming groups, and on platforms such as Second Life (see Boellstorff 2015 for a discussion of Second Life and disability in general). Online communication has stimulated national and international autistic activism, scholarly, and artistic engagement, for example the Society for Disability Studies' Neurodiversity Caucus has an active discussion group on Facebook. Well-known activists and bloggers such as Lydia Brown (https://www.autistichoya.com/) can generate complex discussions growing out of blog posts and there are online demonstrations such as one held annually on March 1st, which is the annual Disability Community Day of Mourning for people who have been killed by family members. (https://autisticadvocacy.org/home/projects/disability-community-day-of-mourning/). In addition, consider this social media attack on Autism Speaks by autistic activists who have long resented the organization's inflammatory, fear-mongering, and hateful rhetoric about autism (https://www.buzzfeed.com/

virginiahughes/autistic-people-spark-twitter-fight-against-autism-speaks?utm_term=.nuaLk0ZoI#.fooD8BKW3).

To be sure, while communicating through technology can be transformative, some autistic people have ambivalent relationships to technology. Here is an example: technology has made a huge difference in Pamela's sister Hope's ability to communicate through typing. Especially in the early years it was hard on her body and stressful to her to type on a desk-top computer. Pamela witnessed Hope crying and sweating and noted that her whole body was shaking as she tried to type brief snippets of information. However the technology and her ease in engaging in typing improved over time. Her early 21st century Dynavox (an early pre-iPad communication device that had similar features but was far clunkier than the iPad) was an improvement though full of bugs and a tendency to crash at key moments that would send Hope into tears and meltdowns. Her personal need to press down hard on the keys made her hand and pointing finger tired and aching, which has not been a problem with the iPad. Typing on an iPad or iPhone has made it much easier for Hope's body and is less stressful in general. But this has not increased her frequency of typing. She still refuses to type if there is any possibility of communicating what she wants using other means. However, Hope now has moments of passion and clarity where she can type with relative ease, needing less physical support than usual and even (though rarely) with no support at all. Most of the time, Hope types a few sentences with great difficulty and often having been somewhat pressured to do so, as she really prefers to communicate in other ways most of the time. Hope prefers methods such as nodding or shaking her head "yes" or "no", pointing, body language (especially body humor), personal signs and sometimes a mix of body language and vocal hums that indicate emotional states. However, she occasionally types paragraphs and sometimes pages. This takes hours and is clearly exhausting both for Hope and those supporting her.

It is also important to consider mediated or facilitated communication, beyond the use of technology. Interpreting between a signed language and a spoken language is increasingly recognized as both a skill and a profession around the world and interpreters mediate communication between deaf and hearing people. Theories about best practices in interpreting have moved from the machine model to looking at interpreting as inherently an interaction between all parties, including the interpreter (Wadensjo 1998). Interpreters are variously seen as providing language services, social services, and/or providing communication access and protecting deaf peoples' civil rights. Interpreting research is a growing field with MA programs around the world and a PhD program at Gallaudet University. There is also computer assisted real-time captioning (CART) which many deaf students and professionals utilize, although there has not been much research on this means of providing communication access.

Similarly, in autistic studies there has been a significant focus on mediated communication, often in the form of facilitated or supported communication. Facilitated communication (FC) is where autistic people, like Hope, who have expressive aphasia and motor initiation difficulties are encouraged to communicate by another person providing a prompting physical touch. This may be at the wrist, lower or upper arm, shoulder, or even, a touch on a person's upper back. Usually the technique begins with hand-over-hand support of the autistic person's wrist but with the intent to diminish support over time to the extent that less or even no physical touch is needed at all. Many clinical and developmental researchers (such as those speech language pathologists publishing in anti-FC articles in the special issue of the journal *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* (https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/rps/39/3) are strongly against this methodology because of the potential for influence and even abuse. Research trials have been conducted that have shown that the methodology either does not function at all or does not function consistently. Other studies have shown evidence that the technique can be successful (Cardinal and Falvey 2015) and there are also qualitative studies of many individuals who began to type using facilitated communication and then progressed eventually to communicating without need of physical touch (Biklen et al. 2005). Because FC usually appears in the media in relation to scandals and crimes, as in the recently publicized case of Anna Stubblefield (https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/magazine/the-strange-case-of-anna-stubblefield.html), it has an unsavory reputation and clinicians are hesitant to use it for fear of being associated with a methodology that has such a negative reputation. Yet Hope and many other people with whom Pamela has interacted have used the technique without scandal or abuse in uncontroversial and helpful ways. Even staff in Hope's programs that initially were disbelieving came to respect FC due to examples of incidental validation over the course of Hope's daily life. And for those starting the technique very young, like the autistic activists Adam Wolfond and Jamie Burke and several others profiled by Biklen et al. (2005), the potential to achieve more complex communication as supports are no longer needed is exciting (although we recognize that this is not a goal that everyone shares or that can be achieved). People with "loud hands" are attending college classes and earning degrees and parents of young autistic children are taking notice of this and demanding access to such methodologies, even contested ones such as facilitated communication (Chandler 2017).

Thus we see that contrary to what has been previously foregrounded in deaf studies and autistic studies, deaf and autistic people actually draw upon a wide range of semiotic and communicative repertoires and communication modalities. This is an area of productive overlap as both deaf and autistic people confront normative language ideologies about what language is and how it should be produced as well as the role of other people, machines, and technology in mediating communication. Overlaps in these two fields offer a space to ask questions about the role of individual agency in communication, the function of hegemonic language ideologies in deciding what is language, and the ways that different forms of mediated interaction can and do shape language and communication. However, there is a difference between "beautiful" signing that is a "feast for the eyes" and "loud hands" in that "loud hands" challenge us to consider and recognize non-linguistic intelligibility in addition to both our language and semiotic ideologies. We contend that "loud hands" lead to analytical discomfort in ways that signed languages do not because signed languages are (increasingly) recognized and authorized by scholars, lay people, and institutions.[8]

Identity/community/culture

As discussed above, since the early 1980s, deaf studies scholars have proclaimed the existence of a deaf culture (Padden 1980). In addition to considering how concepts of deaf culture are exclusionary and limiting– how do you know if someone has deaf culture or does not?– scholars have started to move towards thinking about deaf communities and deaf cultures as after all, as we know from Monaghan, Nakamura, and Turner (2003), there are many ways to be deaf. And even more recently, there has been a focus on intersectionality within deaf studies (Ruiz-Williams et al. 2015; Kusters, De Meulder, and O'Brien 2017a) and a desire to complicate deaf experiences and identities as being plural, articulatory, and context-dependent.

This is one key area where autistic studies can contribute to deaf studies. At CASL 2014, Michele encouraged autism researchers not to fall into the same trap of demanding autistic culture but to think more expansively, framing the deaf studies experience as a "cautionary tale." However, autism studies has forged a significantly broader path in a focus on neurodiversity, which is defined as the existence of variation and diversity in peoples' cognition and perception (Grace 2013; Silberman 2015; Walker 2015), and now neuroqueer, which is defined by the Cargo Collective as: "a spectrum of identity in which the individuals presented are no longer contained by the patriarchal boxes of definitions when it comes to gender. There is no longer a need to classify and personalize one-self as Male or Female, Abled or Non-able." (https://cargocollective.com/neuroqueerrooster/NeuroQueers). As disability activist Corbett O'Toole writes on the Neuroqueer blog (https://neuroqueer.blogspot.com/2015/02/what-is-neuroqueer-and-why-should-i.html):

> NeuroQueer is a big clubhouse where you are welcome if you want to be there. And while it's chaotic, there are definitely some important ground rules. No one neurology is above anyone else. So folks who type for communication hold the same possibilities for leadership as folks who speak. People are the only experts on themselves – outside evaluations might be useful for some folks sometimes – but the only expert is the NeuroQueer person themselves, not any professional.

Neuroqueerness is especially productive as it allows multiple kinds of people to come under this categorical umbrella and does not create binaries or make distinctions between diagnoses and perhaps most significantly between "low functioning" and "high functioning" people.[9] As Thomas and Boellstorff (2017) point out, many autistic advocates refuse the ways that the metaphor of the spectrum differentiates people and people across the spectrum claim likeness and affiliation with each other. In fact, this refusal of hierarchy and the assertion that all people have value in their unique and quirky ways of being in the world has much to offer deaf studies, which has traditionally focused on the "right way to be deaf" as a good signer with substantial deaf social and cultural capital. Indeed, it seems to us that what the neuroqueer umbrella offers us is both a critique and a remaking of normative forms of social and cultural capital; it is an expansive umbrella.

While both deaf studies and autistic studies appear committed to the categories of identity, community, and culture, we argue that attending to overlaps and tensions between the two fields provides a productive way of thinking about both the limits and possibilities of these categories. Indeed, we particularly draw inspiration from the idea of the "neuroclown," which Simone Rene Antillon writes: "By embodying the neuroclown, we are embodying a type of neuroqueer – one who tinkers around with their neurology, consciousness and embodiment in a way that embraces failure and seeks to perform social faux pas. Neuroplay and neuroclowning are similar – they are the process of tinkering with one's neurological embodiment, in a playful, childlike way, one that has much room for learning and accepts failure as a natural and necessary part of that learning." (https://neuroqueer.blogspot.com/2016/10/performing-failure-integrating-clowning.html). To be sure, some might rankle at this discussion of neuroclowning and its embrace of childlike behavior in light of the ways that autistic people have been represented as children. However, it is interesting to think about playing with labels and categories of identity which are often drawn in hard and fast lines (such as d/Deaf). Might deaf people conceptualize themselves as neurodiverse, neuroqueer, or as neuroclowns?[10] And if so, might this conceptualization break down binary categorizations of deaf and hearing and allow us to attend to different kinds of deaf experiences?

Converging research endeavors

We propose that scholars and activists interested in deaf and autistic studies come together to think of new shared research endeavors and projects, relating to the topics outlined above. How might using methodology from sign language linguistics research help us to further understand, theorize, document, and validate different forms of autistic communication? Or, conversely, how might thinking critically about such research in relation to autistic communication confront ableist research practices in relation to communication and language, specifically those that foster ideologies of recognition that privilege linguistic subjects? How might the concept of neuroqueer help deaf studies scholars create newer and more expansive ideas of deaf experiences and sociality? Additionally, how might current research on multimodality and the use of expansive communicative repertoires in language and communication create new pathways for understanding deaf and autistic peoples' language and communication practices? For example, consider an older deaf adult learning a signed language for the first time or the way that Pamela's sister Hope shook, sweated, and cried when she tried to type on a computer in the early years. In these cases, bodies become resources—both linguistically and non-linguistically—and are essential to engaging and communicating in a sensorial and sensual manner with the world and each other.

In taking up these questions, it is important to include and foreground both deaf and autistic peoples' voices (however they are present; thinking about intersections in deaf and autistic studies requires that we think differently about voice) and desires and to think about developing research methodologies that are inclusive of deaf and autistic peoples' ontologies and epistemologies. To be sure, there is much at stake at this current moment as a result of the proliferation of cochlear implantation, advanced genetic research and legislation that is increasingly mandating what kinds of embryos are allowed to be implanted in the case of *in vitro* fertilization, and renewed arguments between advocates of speech and signed languages, creating a binary and black and white picture of what deaf futures are supposed to look like. In the realm of autism, research funds are being funneled towards cure, genetic markers, and interventions such as ABA. At CASL 2015, for example, a neuroscience researcher stressed the importance of finding a cure for autism, to which an autistic participant countered that she wanted more autistic people and support for autistic culture. She and other autistic scholars were very much concerned about the presence and dominance of "curebies" both at this conference and out in the world (and note that this very much resonant with conversations happening in the realm of deafness about "curing" deafness through cochlear implants and/or genetic therapies).

We emphasize that we are not arguing that deafness and autism are the same but rather that deaf studies works can be both inspirational and cautionary tales about what happens when deafness, or ways of being deaf, become normalized. It may seem that we have focused more on autistic studies in this essay; we do not deny this. We are excited by the analytical and empirical possibilities opened up by and in autistic research and we see deaf studies as providing an important path to follow in terms of documenting deaf peoples' social and cultural practices and in designing spaces where deaf people can thrive and in which their everyday lives and artistic productions can be foregrounded. However, autistic studies as a newly emerging discipline also has much to teach deaf studies about communication and language, the perils of normalization, the need to unravel binaries, and the beauty (and productiveness) of unruly "loud hands" that escape categorizations.

Notes

1. While we recognize the important work that claiming "capital D" Deaf has done for deaf people around the world, for simplicity's sake we attempt to consistently write deaf in the lower case except for when mentioning concepts or terms that are typically written with capitalized Ds. Apologies for any inconsistencies that may exist; hopefully readers will see these inconsistencies as productive.
2. ABA was developed by Lovaas (see Lovaas 1987) to change the behavior of effeminate men. When it did not seem to work (or was not popular), he switched the focus to use the technique with autistic people. It involves pressuring autistic children to behave and communicate in ways considered appropriate to the therapist in consultation with other professionals and parents. Though considered a gold standard behavioral intervention, many autistic scholars and activists describe ABA as coercive and even painful for the autistic person on whom it is enacted (Gruson-Wood 2016). Parallels can be drawn between ABA and forcing deaf children to sit on their hands and teaching deaf children how to speak.
3. We also draw on conversations with Elizabeth Grace, Morton Ann Gernsbacher, and Melanie Yergeau at the two CASL conferences. We thank Mark Aronoff and Matthew Lerner for their work in putting CASL together.
4. Note that "loud hands" is meant as a rejoinder and counter-narrative to medical professionals' and rehabilitation professionals' request for "quiet hands" from autistic people. Thank you to Heather Thomas for pointing this out.
5. We want to flag a recent discussion in deaf studies around the perceived prominence of sign language linguistics and the sense that resources are channeled towards linguistic research on signed languages and not towards research on deaf peoples' histories and experiences. (see https://pigscanfly.blog/2017/05/03/im-not-a-linguist-but-revisited/). This discussion is of relevance in considering trajectories of research on autism: how to ensure that resources are not heavily funneled towards understanding autistic peoples' language use and not towards understanding autistic peoples' senses of identity, culture, and community?
6. As Mike Gill pointed out to us in personal communication, the figure of autism is often seen to be a child in need of protection and support as propagated by Autism Speaks, for example. In contrast, in recent popular media representations, deafness is embodied by Nyle DiMarco, the recent winner of America's Next Top Model and Dancing with the Stars, or Marlee Matlin, an acclaimed actress, for example.
7. This practice, while designed to enhance meeting accessibility for autistic people, is inaccessible to some blind and visually impaired people who are not able to see the stickers.
8. To be clear, deaf signers still face much discrimination and signed languages are not universally recognized and celebrated. And prior to signed languages being recognized, signers were seen as animal-like and less than human; they were forced to sit on their hands or were restrained in other ways. Similarly, autistic people that stim or flap are currently seen as sub-human and are restrained.
9. To be sure, this is a utopian vision and Pamela has witnessed the establishment of hierarchies, boundaries, and rules around speaking and what is considered acceptable behavior and practice at autism conferences and in everyday interactions. However, we are interested in the aspirational aspects of this definition and proclamation of neuroqueerness.
10. We have yet to see deaf people adopt the language of neurodiversity. While Bauman and Murray (2014, xxi) discuss the neurodiversity movement and locate deaf peoples' contributions to human and biodiversity alongside it, they do not conceptualize deaf people as neurodiverse themselves. And while (deaf and hearing) neuroscience researchers research how deaf peoples'

brains might differ from those belonging to hearing people, this has not been considered an example of neurodiversity. In addition, as evidenced on an All Deaf discussion thread, deaf people can shun the label of neurodiversity and see it as negative (https://www.alldeaf.com/threads/are-deaf-people-neurodivergent.126792/). Michele thanks Stephanie Lloyd for discussions around this topic as well.

Acknowledgements

We thank Heather Thomas, Mike Gill, and Morton Ann Gernsbacher for helpful feedback on this essay. We also thank our interlocutors and of course Mark Aronoff and Matthew Lerner for their work in putting the two Conversations on Autism and Sign Language together. Pamela thanks Hope Block, Estee Klar and Adam Wolfond for all of their support and Michele thanks Mara Green and Stephanie Lloyd for helpful conversations. We also thank two anonymous reviewers from Senses & Society and the journal's amazing editor, David Howes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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